

Message Text

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46

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4207

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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SUBJECT: PANAMA'S BID FOR UN SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT

REF: PANAMA 3388

SUMMARY: ARGENTINA'S WITHDRAWAL OF HER BID FOR A UN SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT TO OPEN THE WAY FOR PANAMA'S CANDIDACY CONSTITUTES A MAJOR DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY VICTORY FOR GENERAL TORRIJOS, AND A PERSONAL COUP FOR FOREIGN MINISTER TACK WHO ORCHESTRATED

PANAMA'S CAMPAIGN TO GAIN LATIN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR PANAMA'S CANDIDACY. TORRIJOS' OPPONENTS HAD BEEN RIDICULING PRE-DICTIONS IN THE GOP-GUIDED PRESS THAT ARGENTINA WOULD MAKE THIS GESTURE IN FAVOR OF PANAMA. COMING DURING A LULL IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND AMID NATTERING CRITICISM ABOUT THE GOP'S CONDUCT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS, THIS FOREIGN POLICY SUCCESS IS A FEATHER IN THE GOP'S CAP. FOR TACK ESPECIALLY, THE TASTE OF VICTORY MUST BE ESPECIALLY SWEET COMING AS IT DOES IN THE MIDST OF REPORTS ON THE COCKTAIL CIRCUIT THAT HIS TENURE AS FOREIGN MINISTER MAY BE OVER. HE HAD PREDICTED TO HIS ADVISERS (SEE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REFTEL) THAT ARGENTINA WOULD WITHDRAW ITS BID FOR THE SEAT.

ARGENTINA'S GESTURE, TOGETHER WITH THE EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY PANAMA HAS RECEIVED FROM OTHER GOVERNMENTS OF LATIN AMERICA, SHOULD LAY TO REST ANY DOUBTS THAT PANAMA HAS SOLID LATIN SUPPORT FOR ITS ASPIRATIONS ON THE CANAL ISSUE. FOR THE UNITED STATES THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: FAILURE TO SOLVE THE CANAL ISSUE IN A MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY MANNER WOULD MEAN THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT ONLY WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY, IF AT ALL, WOULD BE ABLE TO PROCEED TO RESOLVE OTHER MORE GENERAL PROBLEMS ON ITS LATIN AMERICAN AGENDA. END SUMMARY.

1. ARGENTINA'S FORMAL WITHDRAWAL OF ITS BID FOR A UN SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT DURING 1976, MADE PUBLIC IN PANAMA CITY JUNE 13, WAS A SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC POLITICAL AS WELL AS FOREIGN POLICY VICTORY FOR GENERAL TORRIJOS AND FOREIGN MINISTER TACK. EVEN GOP SUPPORTERS AND SOME OFFICIALS OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN SKEPTICAL THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN, ALTHOUGH THE GOP-CONTROLLED PRESS HAD CONSISTENTLY EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT A "NOBLE GESTURE" FROM ARGENTINA WOULD BE FORTHCOMING, AND TACK HAD TOLD HIS ADVISERS THAT HE WOULD SOON BE RECEIVING A MESSAGE FROM FOREIGN MINISTER VIGNES FORMALLY WITHDRAWING ARGENTINA'S CANDIDACY.

2. DOMESTICALLY, THE VICTORY HAS SIGNIFICANCE FOR TORRIJOS BECAUSE THE GOP'S OPPONENTS HAVE USED THE COCKTAIL CIRCUIT FOR RIDICULING THE OPTIMISM THE GOP-CONTROLLED PRESS HAD BEEN EXPRESSING CONCERNING PANAMA'S CANDIDACY. SOME PEOPLE HAD BEEN QUESTIONING THE VALUE OF THE RECENT VISITS OF HIGH-LEVEL DELEGATIONS TO EACH OF THE LATIN AMERICAN NATIONS TO FURTHER CONSOLIDATE AND ORCHESTRATE LATIN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR PANAMA'S ASPIRATIONS CONCERNING THE CANAL AND FOR A SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT. IN ADDITION AN UNDERCURRENT OF CRITICISM, STIMULATED BY TORRIJOS' OPPONENTS AND HARDLINERS WHO OPPOSE THE COMPROMISES THEY SENSE TORRIJOS IS MAKING IN THE TREATY TALKS, HAD BEEN GROWING CONCERNING THE GOP'S HANDLING OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. THE OPENING OF THE WAY FOR PANAMA TO ASSUME A SEAT ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL NEXT YEAR WILL HELP MUTE THIS CRITICISM.

3. FOR FOREIGN MINISTER TACK, WHO HAS BEEN ORCHESTRATING THE CAMPAIGN TO OBTAIN SUPPORT OF PANAMA'S BID FOR A UNSC SEAT AND WHO PERSONALLY LED THE MISSION TO BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITHDRAWAL IS A SIGNIFICANT PERSONAL COUP. REPORTS OF A REDUCTION IN HIS INFLUENCE AND OFFICIAL STATUS HAD BEEN CIRCULATING. HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH THIS SUCCESS CANNOT BUT STRENGTHEN HIS INFLUENCE REGARDLESS OF WHAT HIS OFFICIAL STATUS MAY BE.

4. FINALLY, IF ANY DOUBTS REMAINED ANYWHERE CONCERNING THE WILLINGNESS OF LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS TO SUPPORT

PANAMA'S ASPIRATIONS CONCERNING THE CANAL, ARGENTINA'S GESTURE SHOULD LAY THEM TO REST. THIS, COUPLED WITH PREVIOUS FIRM EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT PANAMA RECEIVED AT THE OAS AND IN RESPONSE TO THE SPECIAL PANAMANIAN MISSIONS WHICH VISITED LATIN NATIONS, INDICATES CLEARLY THAT THE PANAMA CANAL PROBLEM IS A KEY ISSUE IN U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS. IN THE ABSENCE OF A MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY SETTLEMENT WITH PANAMA CONCERNING THE CANAL, THE UNITED STATES CANNOT EXPECT TO HAVE A TRANQUIL ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH TO SOLVE THE OTHER ISSUES ON ITS LATIN AGENDA. PANAMA IS NOT LIKELY TO ALLOW SUCH TRANQUILITY. SOLUTION OF THE CANAL PROBLEM, THEREFORE, IS ESSENTIAL TO PROGRESS IN SOLVING OTHER HEMISPHERIC PROBLEMS.

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